
THE
Voyage of Groseilliers and Radisson
1652 to 1684

By ROBERT F. KERR

**Printed Here to Negatively Settle the Contention that these Men
Visited Dakota**

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In all the early histories of the Dakotas, there is a state something like the following: "Two young Canadian fur traders accompanied a party of Indians to the far west, in 1654, and, it is thought, were the first white men who entered the Present Territory of Dakota." On page 176 of Andreas' Historical Atlas of Dakota, it is claimed that these two fur traders visited Jerauld county, in what is now South Dakota, and traded in furs in that year. That this tradition is founded upon fact is the contention of many students of our early history. Consequently, at the request of the executive committee of the department of history of the state of South Dakota, I shall endeavor to prepare a paper on the subject of this early visitation.

The earliest recorded narrative of any travelers who penetrated the territory west of the Great Lakes is that of the two Frenchmen, Groseilliers and Radisson. The travels of these two are occasionally alluded to in the earlier histories of New France, but it was not until recent years that we have had access to an authentic account of their travels written by one of them. The volume is entitled "Voyages of Peter Esprit Radisson, being an Account of his Travels and Experiences among the North American Indians from 1652 to 1684. Transcribed from the original manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and the British Museum. With historical illustrations, and an introduction, by
on D. Scull, London; England. Boston : Published by the
ce Society. 1885."

The preface of this very interesting book states that the contents remained in manuscript form for more than two hundred years, and in the meantime appear to have escaped the

notice of scholars, as not even extracts from the narratives have, so far as any one is aware, found their way into print. The author was a native of France, and had an imperfect knowledge of the English language. 'The journals, with the exception of the last in the volume, are, however, written in that language and, as might be anticipated, in orthography, in the use of words, and in the structure of the sentences, conform to no known standard of English composition. But the meaning is in all cases clearly conveyed. They were evidently not written for publication, but for the information of some English capitalists who afterwards formed the Hudson Bay Company. The Prince Society says : "In- justice both to the author and reader they have been printed verbatim et literatim, as in the original manuscript."

As I shall have occasion to quote many passages from the book in order to review the story of his adventures and travels, I will not adhere to all his quaint orthography. Many of the incidents related in the text are without apparent order and not closely connected, so that the narratives are difficult to follow. One of the chief perplexities in reviewing his story is to locate the exact routes taken by him and his companion, for the rivers and lakes had no names and the travelers were not astronomers enough to give the latitude and longitude of their stopping places.

Radisson's narratives of his first two voyages are of no special interest in this connection, for he did not visit the northwest. Groseilliers seems to have been engaged in a contraband trade with the Hurons and Ottawas in what is now Upper Canada at the time of Iroquois' raid upon these tribes and their dispersion (1649-50), a full account of which is found in chapters 27 and 28 of Parkman's "Jesuits in North America."

Radisson in closing his account of his second voyage made in the "upper country of the Iroquois," where he was a prisoner, says: "About the last of March (1654) we ended our great pains and incredible dangers. About 14 nights after we went down the 3 rivers where most of us stayed. A month after my brother and I resolves to travel and see countries. We find a good opportunity. In our voyage we proceeded three years. During that time we had the happiness to see very fair countries."

The above was a sort of footnote introduction to his account

of his third voyage. On page 134 of the volume mentioned we quote:

"So my brother seeing me back from those two dangerous voyages, so much by the cruelties of the barbarians as for the difficulties of the ways, for this reason he thought I was fitter and more faithful for the discovery he was to make. He plainly told me his mind; I knowing it longed to see myself in a boat. There were several companies of wild men expected from several places, because they promised the year before, and (to) take advantage of the spring (this to deceive the Iroquois who are always in wait to destroy them), and of the rivers which is by reason of the melting of the great snows which is only that time, for otherwise no possibility to come that way, because for the swift streams that run in summer, and in other places the want of water, so that no boat can come through. We soon see the performance of that people, for a company came to the Three Rivers where we were. They told us that another company was arrived at Mont Royal, and that two more were to come, one to the Three Rivers, the other to Saegne, a river of Tudousack, who arrived two days after. * * * Many go and come to Quebec for to know the resolution of the Governor, who, together with the fathers thought fit to send a company of French to bring back if possible, those wild men the next year, or others, being that it is the best manna of the country by which the inhabitants do subsist, and makes the French vessels to come there and go hack loaded with merchandise for the traffic of furriers who come from the remotest parts of North America.

"As soon as the resolution was made, many undertake the voyage; for where there is lucre there are people enough to be had. The best and ablest men for that business were chosen. * * * Two fathers were chosen to conduct the company, and endeavored to convert some of those foreigners of the remotest country to the Christian faith. * * * About the middle of June we began to take leave of our company and venture our lives for the common good. We find 2 and 30 men, some inhabitants, some Gailliards that desired but do well. What fairer bastion than a good tongue, especially when one sees his own chimney smoke, or when we can kiss our own wives or kiss our neighbor's with ease and delight? * * * At last we take our journey to see the issue of a prosperous venture in such a dan-

gerous enterprise. We resolved not to be the first that should complain. The French were together in order, the wild men also, saving my brother and I, that were accustomed to such like voyages, have fear for what happened afterwards. Before our setting forth we made some gifts, and by that means we were sure of their good will, so that lie and I went into the boats of the wild men. We were nine and twenty French in nuruher and six wild men. We embarked our train in the night, because our number should not be known to some spies that might be in ambush to know our departure ; for the Iroquois are always abroad. We were two nights to get to Mont Royal, where eight Ottawas stayed for us and two French. * * * We stayed no longer there than as the French got themselves ready. Wl'e tool, leave without noise of guns."

Here follows an account of their being waylaid by the Iroquois after they were out three or four days and a running fight in which they lost thirteen "that were killed and taken in that defeat." * * *

Continuing, he says:

"The French seeing they were not able to undergo such a voyage, they consult together, and for conclusion resolved to give an end to such labors and dangers ; moreover, found themselves incapable to follow the wild men, who went with all speed possible night and clay for the fear they were in. The fathers, seeing our weakness, desired the wild men that they might have one or two to direct them, which by no means was granted, but bid us do as the rest. W e still keep our resolution, and, knowing more tricks than they, would not go back, which should be disdainful and prejudicial. We told them so plainly, that we would finish that voyage or die by the way. Besides that, the wild men did not complain of us at all, but encouraged us. After long arguing, everyone had the liberty to go backwards or forwards, if any had courage to venture himself with us. Seeing the great difficulties, all with one consent went back again, and we went on.

"The wild men were not sorry for their departure, because of their ignorance in the affairs of such navigation. It is a great alteration to see one-and-thirty reduced to two. We encouraged one another, both willing to live and die with one another, and that is the least we could do, being brothers (-in-law).

* * * We were come above 300 leagues always against the ar earn' and made sixty carriages (portages), besides the swift streams we overcame by the oars and poles to come to the little lake of the castors (beavers) which may be 30 or 40 leagues in compass. The upper end of it is full of islands, where there is ,lot time lost to wander about, finding wherewithal to make the kettle boil with venison, great bears, castors and fishes, which are plenty in that place.

"The river that we go to the great lake is somewhat favorable. We go clown with ease and running of the water, which empties itself in that lake which we are now coming in. * * *

"We stopped in a bay all full of rocks, small isles.' Here we are stirring about in our boats as nimble as bees.

* * * We divided ourselves into two companies. Seven boats went towards west northwest and the rest to the south. * * * We that were for the south went on several days merrily and saw by the way the place where the Jesuits had heretofore lived; In many places there are many large open fields wherein, I believe, wildnien formerly lived before the destruction of the many nations which (lid inhabit, and took more place then 600 leagues about ; for I can well say that from the river of Canada to the great lake of the Hurons, which is near 200 leagues in length and 60 in breadth, as I guess, for I have [been] round about it. * * * After we travelled many days we arrived at a large island' and where we found their village, their wives and children. You must know that we passed

"There were three routes used by early travelers in getting to the upper lakes from Montreal. One up the Ottawa, across Nipissing and down the French River to Georgian Bay. Another part way up the Ottawa, thence up one of its branches and west through a chain of smalllakes to Simcoe Lake, and down the Severn River to the southeastern part of Georgian Bay. The third up the St. Lawrence River, along the north shore of Lake Ontario to the River Humber, ascending that and crossing to Lake Simcoe, thence down the Severn River. The "little lake of the castors" must have been one of the numerous lakes in the second route. This route has numerous "carriages" (portages), and is undoubtedly the one taken on the trip out.

"This was evidently Matchedash Bay, an arm of the Georgian Bay.

This was the island of Michilimackinac, where most of the Hurons and Ottawas fled from the attacks of the Iroquois when the missions of the Hurons were destroyed in 1649-50.

a strait some three leagues beyond that place. The wildnien gave it a name ; it is another lake, but not so big as that `y,, passed before. We call it the lake of the staring hairs because those that live about it have their hair like a brush turned t1P They all have a hole in their nose. * * * The nation that we were with had wars with the Iroquois and must trade. * * * We were then (after a small battle) possessed by the Hurons and Ottawas; but our mind was not to stay in an island, but to be known with the remotest people. * * * So we desired to go with a company of theirs to the nation of the staring hairs (Hurons). We were welcomed and made much of, saying that we were the gods and devils of the earth ; T * * * That nation called Pottawattamies-without more ado comes and meets us with the rest and peace was concluded. Feasts were made and dames with gifts cante of each side, with a great deal l of mirth. We visited them (luring the winter, and by that means we made acquaintance with another nation called Escotecke, which signified fire,` a fair and proper nation ; they are tall and big and very strong. W e came there in the spring. There they never have seen men with beards, because they pull their hairs as soon as it comes out; but much more astonished when they saw our arms, especially our guns, which they worshipped by blowing smoke of tobacco instead of sacrifice.

"In this last voyage that we made I will let you only know what course we ran in three years time. We desired them to let us know their neighboring nations. * * * Among others they told us of a nation called Nadoneceronon,` which is very strong, with whom they were in wars with, and another wandering nation living only upon what they could come by. Their dwelling was on the side of the salt water in the summer time, and in the land in the winter time, for it is cold in their country. They call themselves Christinos,' and their confederates from all times, by reason of their speech, which is the same, and often

'This tribe lived on the Fox River, Wisconsin, above Lake Winnebago. The Mascoutis, Fire Nation, or Nation of the Prairie, are extinct or merged with other tribes.

'Radisson's method of spelling Nadouessioux, which has been shortened to the word Sioux.

'Christinos, variously spelled, but best known as the Knisteneaux, who dominated all the country between Lake Superior and Hudson Bay.

have joined together and have had companies of soldiers to war against that great nation. We desired not to go to the north till we had made a discovery in the south, and being desirous to know what they did. They told us if we would go with them to the great lake of the stinkings,' the time was come of their traffic, which was of as many knives as they could get from the French nation, because of their dwellings, which was at the coming in of a lake called Superior, but since the destruction of many neighboring nations they retired themselves to the height of the lake. We knew these people well. We went to them almost yearly, and the company that came up with us were of the said nation, but never could tell punctually where they lived because they 'make the bar of the Christinos from whence they have the castors that they bring to the French. This place is Ooo leagues off, by reason of the circuit which they must do with the Hurons and the Ottawas, from whence we came last, furnishes them also, and comes to the farthest part of the lake of the stinkings, there to have light earthen pots and girdles made of goat's hairs, and small shells that grow at the sea-side, with which they trim their cloth made of skin. * * * We, finding this opportunity to go south would not let it slip, but made gifts, telling them that the other nation would stand in fear of them because of us. * * * I can assure you that I liked no country as I havewherein we wintered (1654-55), for whatsoever a man could desire was to be had in great plenty; viz: stags, fishes in abundance, and all sorts of meat, corn enough.

"We nevertheless put ourselves in hazard, for our curiosity, of stay two or three years among that nation."

Having spent the winter with the Hurons and the Ottawas, who were then living upon the islands at the north part of the Lake of the Puans (Green Bay), they started on their southward journey in the spring of 1655. Radisson says: "We embarked ourselves on the delightfulest lake of the world. I took notice of the cottages and of the journeys of our navigation, for because that country was so pleasant, so beautiful and fruitful, that

'Green Bay, called Baye des Puans by early writers, for the reason, it is supposed, that some portion of the bay was said to have an odor like the sea. The Winnebagos, living near it, were called Les Puans.

it grieved me to see that the world could not discover such enticing countries to live in. This I say because that the Euro_ peans fight for a rock in the sea against one another, and for sterile land and horrid country, that the people sent here or there by changenient of air, engenders sickness and dies thereof. Contrarywise these kingdoms are so delicious and under so tern perate a climate, the earth bringing forth its fruit twice a year, the people live long and lusty and wise in their way. We meet with several nations, all sedentary, amazed to see us and were very civil. The further we sojourned the delightfuller the land was to us. I can say that [in] my lifetime I never saw a more incomparable country, for all I have been in Italy; yet Italy comes short of it, as I think, when it was inhabited, and now forsaken of the wildnien. Being about the great sea, we conversed with people that dwelleth about the salt water, who told us that they saw some great white thing sometimes upon the water, and came towards the shore, and men in the top of it, and made a noise like a company of swans; which made me believe that they were mistaken, for I could not imagine what it could be, except the Spaniard; and the reason is that we found a barrel broken as they use in Spain. Those people have their hair long. They reap twice a year; they are called Tatarga,s that is to say, buff. They war against Nadonecerons, and war also against the Christinos. These two do no great harm to one another because the lake is between both. They are generally stout men and they are able to defend themselves. They came but once a year to fight. r We were everywhere made much of; neither wanted victuals, for all the different nations that we met conducted us and furnished us with all necessities.

"The summer passed away with admiration by the diversity of the nations that we saw, as for the beauty of the shore of that sweet sea. * * * There are birds whose bills are two and twenty thumbs long. That bird swallows a whole salmon, keeps it a long time in his bill. We saw also she-goats, very big. There is an animal somewhat less than a cow whose meat is exceeding good. There is no want of stags nor buffs. There

"This is his spelling of the word Tetanka, meaning buffalo it is difficult to determine the tribe he means. It may have been the Teton Sioux.

are so many turkeys that the boys throw stones at them for their recreation. * „ As for the buff, it is a furious animal. one must have a care of him, for every year lie kills some Nadonecerons. He comes for the most part in the plains and meadows, and feeds like an ox. ; The horns of the buffs are as those of an ox but not so long, but bigger, and of a blackish color. He hath a very long hairy tail. He is reddish, his hair frizzed and very fine; all the parts of his body much like unto an ox. The biggest are bigger than any ox whatsoever. The vines grow all by the river side; the lemons are not so big as ours, and sourer. The grape is very big, green, and is seen there at all times. It never freezes there, but is mighty hot; yet for all that, the country is not so unwholesome, for we seldom have seen infirm people. * *

"We were four months in our voyage without doing anything but going from river to river. We met several sorts of people. We conversed with them, being long in alliance with them. By persuasion of some of thei~i we went into the great river that divides itself in two,' where the Hurons and some of the Ottawas and the wild men that had wars with them had retired. There is not great difference in their language, as we were told. This nation have wars against those of the forked river. It is so called because it has two branches, the one towards the west, the other towards the south, which we believe runs towards Mexico, by the tokens they give us. Deing among, these people, they told us the prisoners they take tell them that they have wars against a nation, against men that build great cabins, and have great beards, and have such knives as we have. Xloreover, they showed us a decad of beads and guilded pearls that they have from that people, which made us believe they were Europeans. They showed us one of that nation that was taken the year before. We understood him not; lie was much more tawny" than they with whom we were. His arms and legs were turnedd outside; that was the punishment inflicted on him. So the\, do with them that they take, and kill them with

Good authorities contend that this was the Missouri and that the branch towards the south, which they believed ran towards Mexico, was the Platte.

This is believed to have reference to the African slave that was captured from the Spanish expedition in search of the seven cities of Cibola.

clubs, and do often eat them. They do not burn the prisoners as those of the northern parts. * * * Tending to those people, went towards the south and came back by the north. We had not as yet seen the nation Nadoneceronons. We had Hurons with us. We persuaded them to come along to see their own nation that fled there, but they would not o 1)y any means. We thought to get some castors there to bring down to the French, seeing it at last impossible to us to make such a circuit in a twelve months' time.

"We retired ourselves to the higher lake nearer the Nadoneceronons, where we were well received. * * We arrived then where the nation of the Sault was. * There we passed the winter. * * * Most of the woods and forests are very thick, so that in some places it was as dark as a cellar. The snow that falls, being very light, has not the strength to stop an eland (moose)."

The remainder of the account of this third voyage is taken up with narratives of their experiences in hunting and trading around the western shores of the Great Lakes, acting as peacemakers between hostile tribes, and preparing for their home Tourney. The second summer Radisson continues

"That summer I went hunting, and my brother stayed where he was welcome and put up a great deal of Indian corn that was given him. I -le intended to furnish the wild men that were to go down to the French, if they had not enough. The wild men did not perceive this; for if they wanted any, we could Hardly keep it for our use. The winter passed away in good correspondence one with another. We sent ambassadors to the nations that used to go down to the French, which rejoiced them the more and made us pass that year with a greater pleasure, saving that my brother fell into the falling sickness, and many were sorry for it. That proceeded only from long stay in a new discovered country, and idleness contributed much to it. There is nothing comparable to exercise. * * * After he languished awhile God gave him his health again. The desire that everyone had to go down to the French made then earnestly look out for castors. There were no less, I believe, than five hundred men that were willing to venture themselves. The corn that my brother kept did us a world of good."

Here follows a description of a panic caused by another

attack upon the Hurons by the Iroquois. and the diplomacy of the two traders in getting under way with their equipage. They passed the lakes without danger, but had to fight the Iroquois on their voyage down the Ottawa River. In a mishap in running one of the rapids in the river, the canoe in which Radisson's brother was turned over, and his (Groseilliers) book of notations of the last year was lost, and we have no particulars concerning his travels and transactions. Radisson's narrative closes as follows

The Iroquois got a great way before us, not well satisfied to have stayed for us, having lost seven of their men; two of them were not nimble enough, for our bullets and arrows made them stay for good and all. Seven of our rnen were sick, who had barely escaped from being drowned, and two were wounded by the Iroquois. * * * The next day we went on without .any delay nor encounter. * * * We came to Quebec, where we were saluted with the thundering of the guns and batteries of the fort, and of the three ships that were then at anchor, which would have gone back to France without castors if we had not come. We were well treated for five clays. The Governor made gifts and sent two brigantines to bring us to the Three Rivers, where we arrived the second clay.

"That was the end of our three years' voyage and a few months (1657) After so much pain and danger God was so merciful as to bring us back safe to our dwelling, where the one was made much of by his wife, the other by his friends and kindred. * *

"They went away the next clay, and we stayed at home at rest that year. My brother and I considered whether we should discover what we had seen or no ; and because we had not a full and whole discovery, which was that we have not been in the Bay of the North (Hudson's Bay), not knowing anything but by the report of the wild Christinos, we would make no mention of it for fear that those wild men should tell us a fib. We would have made a discovery of it ourselves and have an assurance before we should discover anything of it."

Fourth Voyage.

The fourth voyage of these two traders commenced in the summer of 1658. The only part of the narrative that is of par-

ticular interest in this connection is the account of their visit to the Sioux. On account of some unreasonable demands of the Governor in a business way they departed in secret and after a dangerous and laborious trip arrived safely at the Sault Ste. Marie. They visited the copper regions and discovered the pictured rocks of Lake Superior. They built a fort probably at the outlet of Rainy Lake, and visited the Indians along the shores of a lake four days' journey from their fort. Here they passed a distressing winter, in which many of the natives died of starvation. In the spring two men visit them from a strange land, whom they say were Nadoneceronons. After two moons eight ambassadors came from the same nation "that we will call now the Nation of the Beef." Much space is taken up in a description of the festivities and formalities of this occasion. Many of the customs of these visiting people are accurately described. 11, the ceremonies they smoked a calumet made of "a red stone, as big as a fist and as long as a hand." After the ambassadors' visit and feasting, others of the Nadoneserons came, and more ceremonies and entertainment. A sort of truce was arranged between hostile nations and trade relations established. The following relates to their visit to the Sioux

"This feast ended, everyone returns to his country well satisfied. To be as good as our words, we came to the nation of the beef, which was seven small journeys from that place. We promised in like manner to the Christinos that the next spring we should come to their side of the upper lake, and there they should meet us, to come into their country. We being arrived among the nation of the beef, we wondered to find ourselves in a town where were cabins most covered skins and other close mats. They told us that there were 7,000 men. This we believed. -These have as many wives as they can keep. If one did trespass upon the other, his nose was cut off, and often the crown of the head. The maidens have all manner of freedom, but are forced to marry when they come of age. The more they bear children the more they are respected. There they have no wood, and make provisions of moss for their firing. This their place is environed with pearches which are a good distance one from another, that they get in the valleys where the buff use to repair, upon which they do live. They sow corn, but their harvest is small. The soil is good, but the cold hinders it,

and the grain very small. * * * The people stay not there all the year; they retire in winter towards the woods of the north, where they kill a quantity of castors, and I say there are not so good in the whole world; but not in such store as the Christinos, but far better. We stayed there six weeks, and came back with a company of people of the nation of the Sault, that came along with us laden with booty. * * *

The remainder of their sojourn in the north country and their return to their home in 1660 it is not necessary to describe. At the end of the account of his fourth voyage he gives the names of the several nations amongst which he had been for the most part, which he thinks may extend some good leagues from the reckoning, of his travels. There is a list of 31 names of the nations in the south from the Avieronnais to the Socoquis. It is difficult to identify many of these. "All these are sedentaries, and live upon corn and other grains, citrulls (pumpkins), by hunting and fishing, which is plentiful, and by the ragouts of roots. There were many destroyed by the Iroquois, and I have seen most of them that are left."

Of the names of the thirty-nine nations that live in the north but few are easily identified. Two of the thirty-nine "are sedentary and do reap, and all the rest are wandering people."

Conclusions

That Radisson and Groseilliers did not visit the Dakotas in 1654 is evident from a perusal of Radisson's journal. They did not start from Canada till the autumn of that year. In their journey southward the next year they must have traversed a good part of the Mississippi, else they would not have found a country resembling Italy in climate and fertility. If they visited the Missouri as far as the Platte on their homeward journey they could not have crossed South Dakota without coming in contact with the Sioux, whom they say they did not visit on this voyage, for the Nadoneceroon or Sioux occupied the Dakotas and nearly all of Minnesota at that time. In avoiding these they were confined to the slopes of Lake Michigan and to central and southern part of the Mississippi Valley. Not until the fourth voyage did they visit the Sioux and that was at their rendezvous around Mille Lacs. They were with this nation six weeks in the summer of 1659. It is possible that they made some excursions

from this lake to get beaver pelts, for a company of people came back with them "laden with booty." It is not more than 200 miles from Mille Lacs to jerauld county in a straight line, and good beaver were to be found along the streams of this state at that time. A 400-Mile journey on foot and in canoes could have been made in less than six weeks. So if these two traders visited this country it was in 1659 and not 1654. They (lid not mention any excursions while among the Sioux. If, however, Radisson visited all the tribes he enumerates at the close of the account of the fourth voyage he was at many places not mentioned in his book.

If the date of the visit to Wessington Hills is correct it must have been by a couple of coureurs (le bois, or bush-rangers, whom Parkman says were "half-civilized vagrants" who roamed everywhere and were more Indian than white in their acquired habits. Some traders without license may have found this rich hunting ground for beavers, but they kept no journals, and their names will never be known except we find the account book of- an early contraband trader in the archives of some old library.